

Romanian Youths' Civic Identities: 20 Years After the Revolution

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Abstract: The study explores the civic identities of Romanian youth. Children born after 1989 have no memory of the communism; yet, they are the children and students of those who were educated under communism. Data sources were small group interviews with 21 youth and results indicate that participants believe *civic engagement is possible and desired*; but few are engaged because they believe that *freedom is misunderstood* and *corruption permeates everything*; and, ultimately, *nothing changes*. Civic education is one factor in developing civic identity; and, knowing youths' constructions of their identity is one source of information to consider as civic education curriculum evolves.

Key words: Romania, civic identity, civic education

A change will come in the following years; I hope. It is a process that needs time like the birth of a baby. He is weak; in his first hours he needs protection; kept in an incubator. In the first years of life, he depends on parents and family. I think it is [the] same for democracy or any political system in the first years of life. (Vasile)

Romania is one of several eastern European nations that began a transition from an authoritarian and communist system to a democratic political system and free market economy in the 1989–1991 time frame. The last two decades have brought tremendous changes to the citizens and residents in all of these nations as political, social, and economic systems continue to evolve as new relationships and roles are defined, and new identities are created. For Romanian youth, the previous dictatorship is not even their own memory; however, it is firmly in the memory of the adults in their individual and institutional lives (Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999). Those children born just after the 1989 revolution have no memory of the previous regime; yet, they are the children and grandchildren of those who grew up under communism and many are the students of teachers who grew up and were educated under communism. They are also citizens in a nation run by those who grew up under an authoritarian regime. How these young people view and craft a civic identity for themselves, individually and as a generation, is connected to their nation's history, as well as their experiences; and the civic identity they craft will determine their nation's future. The past is a large part of the youths' daily interactions with adults and powerful institutions; and, the future of Romania will be theirs to shape. In another 20 years, today's youth will run the nation. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the developing civic identities of Romanian, specifically Transylvanian, youth.

Crafting a Civic Identity

What it means to be a citizen of any nation or community is complex and situated politically, historically, economically, and culturally. According to Knight Abowitz and Harnish (2006), 'citizenship, at least theoretically, confers membership, identity, values, and rights of participation and assumes a body of common political knowledge' (p. 653). One's civic identity is constructed

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©2012/2013 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

through assimilation and accommodation as one searches for equilibrium (Fosnot, 1996) in making sense of his or her world. In other words, and while not a linear process, youth in emerging democracies are understanding their civic world as they navigate through what they learn in school, from their parents, from the national and international media, and from their civic leaders. They are shaping their civic identities through what are often contradictory experiences.

A civic identity refers to a person's sense of belonging to a larger polis and a sense of responsibility to contribute to its health (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). The glue that holds identity together is ideology, defined as a set of beliefs that links one to a broader historical and cultural world and that signals one's social and political commitment (Erikson, 1994/1968; Gee, 1996; Youniss & Yates, 1997) (as cited in Kirshner, 2009, p. 415).

The construction of a civic identity, learning what it means to be a citizen of a state, is a responsibility shared among multiple formal and informal institutions. Education, or schooling, is one of the formal institutions that participates in the socialization of young citizens (Arthur, Davies, & Hahn, 2008; Flanagan & Faisen, 2001; Wiseman, Astiz, Fabrega, & Baker, 2011). This citizenship education may occur in schools through structured lessons focused on political and historical knowledge and requisite skills (Cowan & McMurry, 2011; Pasek, Feldman, Romer, & Jamison, 2008), as well as informally through participation in civic traditions such as youth councils, sports, or school clubs (Ludden, 2011; Michelsen, Zaff, & Hair, 2002). But, the formal institution of school is still only one place to learn what it means to be a citizen and to begin to craft a civic identity. Young citizens also learn informally through established political processes, community organizations, family, and the media (Bertram & Lin, 2009; Boyd, Zaff, Phelps, Weiner, & Lerner, 2011; Vercellotti & Matto, 2010). Young citizens in more established and long-standing democracies (i.e., democratic republics or representative democracies), also have the opportunity to learn from generations of the collective and individual experiences of older citizens, as well as through well-established civic traditions (e.g., honoring those who died in wars of liberation through specific holidays, patriotic songs extolling virtues such as freedom or allegiance to the state or even a specific leader). In sum, learning what it means to be a citizen of a nation-state, and crafting one's civic identity, are built upon numerous and varied experiences. Understandably, these experiences differ within different contexts. The national context of established democratic state vs. emerging democratic state is just one of many contexts.

Civic Identities in Established Democracies

In long-established democracies, a democratically-aligned civic identity is relatively consistently crafted. While exemplars of democratic institutions and good democratic citizens may change over time as examples become tarnished with time, additional information is gained, and new interpretations are made, for the most part, the ideology or beliefs that bind citizens to their state remain relatively consistent. If individualism or meritocracy were important values in the state's infancy, they continue to be valued. If a commitment to the rule of law was part of the state's ideology, it probably still is. The nuances of the ideology have changed; the examples change as new internal and external political relationships are crafted; and, there are challenges to how well these ideals have included marginalized members of society. But the core ideology and beliefs remain consistent.

It is important to note that in the crafting of a civic identity even in an established democracy or democratic republic, an individual may craft an identity that while consistent with the democratic

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ideals of the established state, the identity may also incorporate elements such as distrust of political institutions. Given varying individual experiences, as well as the collective experiences for historically marginalized populations, civic identities are not just politically situated. They are also historically and culturally situated. For example, research conducted in the United States (Kirshner, 2009; Levinson, 2007; Rubin, 2007) has explored how some youth from historically marginalized populations within the United States have constructed civic identities, sometimes characterized by cynicism, apathy, and disengagement (Levinson, 2007; Youniss & Hart, 2005) or civic identities that value types of civic engagement that are inconsistent with traditional civic engagement measures (Dalton, 2009).

Civic Identities in Emerging Democracies

In newer or emerging democracies, particularly multi-ethnic states, like Romania, the development of a democratically-aligned civic identity co-exists with an ethnic identity, both of which may be situated within a human rights agenda (Georgescu, 1998). In addition, Romanians are navigating a European identity (Dragoman, 2008; Fuss, 2003; Osler, 2010) enhanced by Romania's joining of the European Union (EU) in 2007. Prioritizing and synthesizing these sometimes competing goals with a recognition that some emerging democracies, like Romania, look to the West as a 'model of organizing the political space' (Dragoman, 2008, p. 63), further supports the development of a complex and unique civic identity. For example, Dragoman's study of identity in the Transilvanian city of Sibiu indicates a conflation of civic (i.e., political) and ethnic (i.e., origin) aspects of citizenship and identity, similar to Sekulic's (2004) work in Croatia. Further, the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania in 1989 may be seen as a 'critical juncture' (Marcussen, Risse, Engelmann-Martin, Knopf, & Roscher, 2001, p. 103) and an opportunity to frame new social (e.g., civic) identities that embrace shifting ideologies that are more democratic in nature. The shaping of these new identities are facilitated by political elites; however, the ideologies make their way from broad national policy into the daily lives of citizens through local institutions (e.g., schools, city councils), electoral processes, and media.

While a strong body of literature exists that explores the political or civic knowledge and civic attitudes of youth in both established and emerging democracies (Badescu, 2011; Badescu & Radu, 2010, Torney-Purta et al., 1999), this work is predominantly quantitative. There is little work available that specifically focuses on the voices and words of youth. This qualitative study makes a contribution to that void by exploring the developing civic identities of Transylvanian youth through their own words.

Social Construction of Knowledge

Constructivist theory is an appropriate and useful theoretical frame for the qualitative nature of this study (Schwandt, 2000) and specifically for exploring identity in Europe (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, & Grancea, 2006; Christiansen, Jørgensen, & Wiener, 2001). Recently used to examine the identity construction related to European integration, constructivist tenets from both cognitive and socio-cultural traditions are relevant. Cognitively, one can explore how young citizens 'construct their ways of knowing as they strive to . . . restore coherence to the worlds of their personal experience' (Cobb, 1996, p. 34). As Romania struggles to accommodate democratic notions and embrace democratic traditions, young citizens experience the growing pains of a young democracy. Consistent with a constructivist theory of learning, the construction of a civic identity is a process in which 'we as human beings have no access to an objective reality since we are constructing our version of it, while at the same time transforming it and ourselves' (Fosnot, 1996, p. 23). Young Romanians (i.e.,

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Transylvanians) are learning about democracy and civic life through formal and informal social and cultural experiences as all Romanian co-construct democracy, civic life, and civic identities in an evolving and democratic Romania.

Romania

The current state of Romania consists of three former principalities in the Balkan region of Europe: Moldova, Wallachia, and Transylvania. In addition to the political changes in the last 20 years, Romania, like many nations in Europe has a history of shifting borders and loyalties (Spiridon, 2006), including the addition of Transylvania after World War I (WWI) when a majority of Transylvanian residents voted to become part of the Kingdom of Romania (Brubaker et al., 2006). The addition of Transylvania added a substantial ethnic Hungarian minority to Romania and while the political boundaries of Romania remained relatively stable from that point on, the remainder of the 20th century included political and economic instability through involvement in World War II (WWII), Soviet occupation and nearly 50 years of a dictatorial regime that ended in 1989. Romania's brief and violent revolution occurred over the last months of 1989, ending with the December execution of Romania's dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the installation of a democratic political system. While Ceaușescu was gone, the newly democratic system was filled with political appointees and experienced politicians who had worked in the previous regime and little changed in the day to day running of government institutions (Pop, 2006). Therefore, those with the knowledge and access to power, remained in power, at least initially. While a new democratic constitution was adopted in 1991, Romania remained under the control of members of the Communist party until the 1996 election (Georgescu, 1998). At that time, additional political parties gained access to power and the federal government came under the control of a moderate and democratically-aligned party. At present, Romania is a politically stable state with free, fair and frequent elections (Freedom House, 2011). Related, voter turnout is relatively consistent with other nations in central and eastern Europe and ranged from a high of over 80% just after the 1989 revolution, to over 65% in the 2004 election (Sum & Badescu, 2004). While voting is only one behavior associated with a civic identity, civic identity is evolutionary in Romania as the past dictatorship moves more into memory (Ciobanu, 2011) and Romanians explore a democratic path.

Methods

This was an exploratory qualitative study to discover how Romanian (in particular Transylvanian) youth construct their civic identities within a unique time and place in Romanian, European, and world history. The research question for this study is: How do Transylvanian youth characterize their civic identity?

Setting: Transylvania

This study was conducted with Romanian youth from two cities in the Transylvanian region of Romania. Transylvania is in the northwestern part of Romania bordering Hungary, and over the centuries has been ruled by the Romans and was part of the Habsburg, and later the Austro-Hungarian empires before becoming part of the nation of Romania after WWI. It is the most ethnically diverse part of Romania and includes strong Hungarian and German minority populations, as well as a disempowered and relatively invisible Roma minority. The Romanian and Hungarian populations of Transylvania have a tense recent history that has boiled over with ethnic conflicts and nationalistic posturing (Brubaker et al., 2006; Kulcsár & Bradatan, 2007). Citizens in Transylvania, the

site for this study, experience shifting identities, as well as a history of shifting borders. While the youth of Transylvanian Romania have not experienced these shifts, the adults in their world have.

Participants

The 21 participants¹, high school and university students and all volunteers, were between the ages of 16 and 20 (16 females and 5 males) living in two different Transylvanian cities. The two cities were chosen in part because of an existing multi-year professional relationship the first author has with institutions and individuals in both communities. In addition, the first author was living in one of the cities as a Fulbright scholar during data collection. Three schools were chosen because of an existing relationship with teachers and school administration (Viteazul, Novac, Unirii). It was also expected that the participants in the ethnically different Viteazul and Novac might provide different perspectives. Recognizing that these schools represented university attendance or university preparation, two additional schools with technical/non-university profiles (Iancu and Tepeş) were recruited with the assistance of Romanian colleagues. In each of the five schools, the first author met with an administrator and/or recommended teachers to explain the study and ask permission to recruit student participants, who were then recruited following an Institutional Review Board approved script. Three of the 21 participants were in their first year of university studies; the remainder were high school students. The university students attended a large, regionally respected Romanian university (Unirii) and studied in the Faculty of Letters (Liberal Arts). Two of the public schools, Viteazul and Novac were described as having academic profiles, preparing students for university study. The other two schools, Iancu and Tepeş, included vocational preparation programs with the expectation that while some students would attend university, more would directly enter the work force in skilled positions (e.g., technical careers). Aside from the school profiles, all of the high school participants indicated a plan to attend post-secondary education. All of the participants were multi-lingual and spoke English; the majority had academic English proficiency, a requirement at three of the schools.

Table 1.

School Name	School Profile	No. of Participants	Female/Male	Location	Interviewer
Viteazul	Academic preparation & bilingual (Romanian & English)	6	5/1	Large city	1 st author
Novac	Academic preparation Hungarian	4	2/2	Large city	1 st author
Iancu	Technical	4	3/1	Large city	1 st & 3rd authors
Tepeş	Technical	4	3/1	Small city	1 st author with translator
Unirii	Large university	3	3/0	Large city	1 st author

¹ Per the approved Institutional Review Board protocol, pseudonyms are used for the names of all participants, schools, and cities in the study. Participants chose their own pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a series of three semi-structured small group audio-taped interviews designed to explore the participants' civic identities, as well as their understandings of democracy. The portion of the interview guide that specifically addressed civic identity began with the prompt of 'what does it mean to be a citizen?' From this general probe, participants were asked to provide examples of how they and their fellow citizens displayed their citizenship and what they believed good and bad citizenship looked like in a democracy, and distinctions between rights and responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy (see Appendix A for Interview Guide). Given results from a previous pilot study during which it was discovered that participants focused their answers on academic recall, the language and cultural differences, and a goal of qualitative research to explore a topic with depth (Patton, 2002) and as open-ended as possible (Arnot & Dillabough, 2000), the concepts of citizenship and civic identity were examined abstractly and concretely, individually and institutionally. The first author conducted all of the interviews. The interviews at Iancu also included the third author, a Romanian who translated when requested by the participants. The first interview at the Tepeş also included a Romanian colleague who translated, as needed.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory methods were chosen to avoid the imposition of an existing framework for analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Given that many of the existing frameworks for democratic citizenship and civic identity represent American or Western European ideas and legacies of democracy (e.g., Gutmann, 1987; Knight, Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Papastefanou, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), we wanted to approach the analysis as inductively as possible. However, the fact that the researchers most directly involved with the data analysis were from an established democracy (the United States) and neither they nor their families had experienced the legacy of political and geographical shifts of Romania; we were situated politically, historically and geographically very differently from the participants; and, were aware that we brought our own perspectives and civic identities to the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Recognizing that we represented a dominant discourse in democracy, our Romanian co-researcher and third author interrogated our results.

Data were analyzed at two levels. Using a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the first author completed initial analyses after each interview, and then after each series of interviews to begin to search for patterns as well as to adjust subsequent interview protocols. In addition, the results of the initial analyses were reviewed with the third author. The second level of analyses was conducted by the three American co-authors. Through initial and focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), we independently read through the interview transcripts multiple times, noting recurring categories across the interviews, as well as ideas that to which participants repeatedly returned. After discussing the initial codes and categories, we returned to the data to refine our categories and engaged in memo-writing to further conceptualize our categories.

In addition to the analysis of the data as one large data set, the data were reanalyzed by interview (ethnic Romanians interviewed together; ethnic Hungarians interviewed together), allowing for the construction of ethnic group civic identity. Given the history of ethnic tensions in Transylvania (Dragoman, 2008), we expected differing civic identities between the Hungarian and Romanian participants. However, we found no noticeable differences in the interview responses between the two groups in these data. Therefore, the results below are organized around the themes that cross all participants.

Results

In expressing their ideas of what it means to be a citizen, we have some insight into the participants' developing civic identities. In general, their civic identity is characterized by both optimism and pessimism. The participants believe that *civic engagement is possible and desired*; but few are engaged because they believe that the *freedom* that comes with democracy is *misunderstood* and *corruption permeates all* aspects of their lives; and, ultimately, *nothing changes*. In the following paragraphs, we utilize the preceding statement to organize the results. Key phrases from the statement frame separate sections of the results for the purpose of presentation.

Civic Engagement is Possible and Desired

Civic engagement is one component of our participants' civic identities. Definitions of civic engagement vary; however, most definitions include 'individual and collective actions designed to address issues of public concern, including political activism . . . volunteering . . . , and actions such as joining community associations' (Chung & Probert, 2011, p. 227). This definition is consistent with how our participants' construction of civic engagement. Similar to youth in other democracies, both established and emerging (Torney-Purta et al., 1999), Transylvanian youth believe that participating in the political and civic life of the community is a desirable characteristic. In addition, they believe that civic engagement in Romania today is different from life before 1989.

Civic Engagement Before and After 1989

The participants have no personal memories of civic life before the 1989 revolution because of their age. However, the collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992) constructed in informal and formal institutions served as a reference point for understanding their own civic identity. Hope explained the importance of civic engagement in comparison to her understanding of the previous regime. 'I think what we learn now, at school, [is that in] other regimes, in communism for example, you couldn't say your personal opinion, and now you're respected for [your] opinion, not punished'. Similarly, Andi expressed frustration that her family was not able to move from a past construction of civic life and civic engagement to a more current and more democratic construction. She explained:

They seem to expect that one person, and in the communist time, the dictator, [should] do [every]thing for the country. But this is not possible. We all have to have our own contributions and our responsibilities. And now I understand that I have to be active and [I] feel that until now I have been passive. But . . . I'm 18 now and try to participate, to vote, and I try to have an opinion.

In contrast, and with a nod to the previous generation and optimism for younger citizens, Vasile explained,

Well, most people are very happy that we've managed to, they've managed, I actually wasn't born you know . . . some people have managed to overthrow communism and I think there are a lot of enthusiastic teenagers who think they could make a difference, or who want to make a difference, and I think their enthusiasm could drive this country.

The participants differed on their perceptions of the civic engagement of older generations and offer three different constructions. Hope believed that civic engagement was dangerous before 1989; Andi saw this history and prior experience as limiting the current engagement of older generations;

and Vasile credited older generations with ending communist rule. What they share is the belief that civic engagement in Romania post-1989 is desired. Anca articulated the special role of her generation:

We need young people who have the courage and the strength to change because old people will soon die and young people will come to govern. But, if those young people are not bright enough and don't have the desire to change, it will not change.

The participants consistently included civic engagement as part of their civic identity; and they recognized the potential importance of this engagement.

Civic Engagement is a Right and a Responsibility

Once civic engagement was established as important, the participants also described civic engagement as both a right and a responsibility. Elena expressed this dual nature by stating, 'I'm part of the country and I can choose who's going to lead it. . . I also have obligations as a citizen, not only rights, and it makes me feel like a part of something'. When asked how the obligations made her feel a part of something, she replied, giggling, 'It's from the fact that I have to pay taxes, and it kind of makes me equal with the *greats*'. Aside from taxes, she also articulates the benefit of belonging as a consequence of civic engagement. That is, while she is aware of the political nature of her civic identity (rights and responsibilities), she also expresses a social or communal dimension of belonging, consistent with civic republican notions of democratic citizenship (Annette, 2008) as well as Kirshner's (2009) definition of the components of a civic identity. This notion of belonging was also articulated by Vasile, 'Citizenship entails actually caring about the community you're part of, and actually doing something for its good'. Similarly, Robert's vision of belonging included the need 'to go and take part in public activities, [you have] an obligation to not live in your house, stay there every hour of every day, [you should] go out and live an active life, to work and have some kind of life'. In the same interview, Robert's peers also mentioned 'picking up garbage', 'voting', and 'donate blood', further articulating responsibilities.

In particular, many of the participants' examples of civic engagement focus on the environment, including larger environmental issues such as deforestation, as well as community issues such as littering. Given that the goal of addressing environmental challenges is a well-documented problem (see for example, articles in *Central Europe Review*, at *SETimes.com*, or the 2006 report submitted by GHK) and is explicitly stated as an ongoing Millennium Development goal as part of Romania's European Union membership (United Nation Development Program, 2013), it is not surprising that environmental protection is one concrete way to civically engage. During one of the interviews at Novac, when asked about what responsibilities citizens have, the participants shared the following:

Silvia: [It is important] to protect the environment in which now we live. We've got to learn to throw the garbage [in appropriate places].

Kati: To keep your city clean [and] learning to not throw down, but to clean the snow from the front of your house, and things like this.

Interviewer: Why is this important to being a citizen?

Kati: Because you live in a community and you expect from the other ones to keep the street clean and you have to do the same if you expect that.

These kinds of responsibilities may be associated with the type of civic engagement expressed by personally-responsible citizen, as described by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). While participants noted problems in the community and nation that they deeply cared about (e.g., environmental issues, animal abuse, homelessness), none suggested what they could do to organize others or an interest in exploring the systemic or institutional causes of a problem or issue, both of which would have incorporated a different type of civic engagement characterized by more leadership and/or a disposition of social justice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Rather, acting as a citizen was constructed as a solo endeavor one might do next to, or parallel to others, but not necessarily with or for others.

Freedom, as a Key Characteristic of Democracy, is Misunderstood

The participants' civic identities were additionally characterized by their belief that while they understood the complexity of democratic traditions, particularly freedom, many, particularly the older generations (teachers and parents) did not understand because of the older generation's experiences under authoritarian rule. In explaining his decision, as editor of the school's magazine, to focus one entire section on the idea of freedom, Vasile explained,

We can define it. Freedom, you know, it's a concept, but that is hard to define, and it's not just a concept, but rather a way of life. I mean, you can hear a lot of things about freedom without actually getting to know what it is, because you haven't experienced it.

Through this statement, Vasile draws a distinction between his generation of Romanians who have only experienced democracy and the generations before whose formative experiences were not in democracy. This was echoed by Irina, in a different interview, 'Democracy is not necessarily a very good for us. Those who are limited [in their thinking] like communists, they are not thinking so far in terms of need. And because freedom is misinterpreted; I'm not sure if we are going to be the generation [to effect change].'

In a separate interview, one of Vasile's school colleagues, Andi, explained:

Oftentimes people here in Romania tend to mix liberty, freedom in a democracy with anarchy. [They believe it means] simply to do what they want. And, after the revolution, I think that many people tend to think like that, that liberty allows them to do whatever they want, not only to think what they want, but also to do what they want.

This idea was echoed by Dorina, who shared, 'Because many persons believe that because they're living in a democratic state they can do whatever they like to do. They confuse democracy with the wrong form of freedom' (T²).

While Vasile and Irina assigned this misunderstanding to those who are still affected by their experiences under authoritarian rule, Andi, Dorina, and others did not limit this misunderstanding to older generations; they were disappointed with any of their fellow citizens who understood freedom and democracy to mean unlimited rights. Anca, expressing frustration, explained that any misunderstanding of democracy and freedom was more about a disposition than anything else. She stated, 'We don't know what democracy is because we don't have the brain to think [of] what to do.'

² "T" indicates that the participant's oral response was translated from Romanian into English during the interview by a translator.

We're not stupid; we don't have the mentality'. This dispositional component came up in two other interviews as participants explained that misunderstanding was a convenient excuse.

Loradonna (T): If there are some persons who justify their acts just by saying it is democracy. Something like, 'it is democracy so I can do what I want'.

Interviewer: Do they have a limited understanding?

Loradonna (T): They get it wrong [because] some persons understand they have unlimited rights.

This dispositional component was also explained during one interview at Unirii.

Elena: We have many willing people to be paid for something. They think they have the liberty to take something for nothing. They can play with somebody's life. It is too much democracy for them.

Delia: It is misunderstood. Democracy means that the common people have the right to interfere in politics, to express their opinions, not to overcome others' opinions.

These participants returned to this idea of misunderstanding later in the same interview when Elena shared her opinion of adolescents. 'They think they have the power to do whatever they want – to smoke, to drink; it is democratic to do whatever they want; it is a misunderstanding'. This misunderstanding of democracy, whatever the reason, also caused the participants to be wary of democracy, as noted by Irina and Elena in separate conversations above, as well as by Vasile, who said,

But to me, too much freedom can also harm people. I believe that having the opportunity of doing whatever you want can lead you to rebellious acts or illegal acts, commit crimes. You have the feeling that you can do whatever you want, whenever you want . . . even though it's not good for those around you.

While the participants clearly believed that a democratic civic identity, and their own civic identity included the act of balancing individual rights and collective responsibilities, reflecting both liberal and civic republican notions of democracy (Annette, 2008), they believed that their fellow citizens, old and young, were dismissive of any collective responsibilities. Tismăneanu (1998) concurs that, while the institutions are present, the traditions and civic values consistent with democratic institutions are missing in much of Romanian society. As Vasile noted above, believing freedom is the same as doing whatever you want can have dire consequences for any society, especially an emerging democracy.

Corruption Permeates Everything

The concern expressed over a misunderstanding of freedom combined with a perception that corruption permeated every aspect of life in Romania mitigated the participants' optimism about civic engagement, and became a distinct part of their civic identity. With some sadness and pessimism, Vasile noted, 'I hope my vote makes a difference. That's what I hope; I'm not sure'. In general, study participants seemed knowledgeable about their country's political past as retold to them through the adults in their lives, but they also discuss the inability for those currently in political power to effect change from within. For these Transylvanian youth, their newly constituted

democratic state is just a new name ascribed to an old situation. At Viteazul, Idina and Vasile, discussed their perceptions of the current corruption in Romania.

Idina: Nowadays, in profound ways [Romania is] still the same, only different on the surface. Now we are in a democracy, everything is transparent. But really everything is so corrupt; you can't call this a democracy.

Vasile: Romania is an emerging democracy; it is not an established democracy. It is in a period of transition; we all have to figure it out. I believe corruption is not necessarily a characteristic of communism. So, corruption is undefined; [it is] almost unavoidable because people have access to power and people are selfish. They only want what is good for them, not for others around them. So if power is easily obtained, why not go and get some – like to go and buy it at the supermarket. I think it's normal in the first years of a democracy; corruption will appear. It is just natural.

Idina: People are people. I think we are thinking too Latin. I mean Romania, Italy, Spain – in general we have this mentality that everyone is like us and I can definitely assure you that everyone does not think like us. I went to Germany and stayed with relatives. [A] German man is not thinking that corruption is an essence of man. He thinks it is for those who are weak.

Though Vasile speaks to a selfish and human nature of corruption and ties it to power in a period of transition, Idina was quick to identify corruption as a cultural characteristic. She posits that it is only 'Latin' that carry the belief that all politicians are corrupt, in part because of their politically tumultuous past. While there may be disagreement on the causes of corruption in Romania, the topic of corruption was introduced by the participants at every interview site. While Vasile and Idina spoke broadly about corruption, other participants offered specific examples, some they have heard about and some more personally experienced.

Elena shared that 'I've heard that they (members of Parliament) . . . tend to sleep while they're in [the Parliament meetings]. When they have to vote they don't know for what they are voting because they don't pay attention'. In addition to concerns about Parliament, Gigi, a participant at another school, explored corruption in the judicial system by stating, 'A lot of criminals have escaped very easy, or they received almost no sentence. I believe [this is] mostly because of corruption, which is very heavily fitted very deep in the system; and, that's a problem'. Others shared their own stories of corruption. Roxana's story below is but one example of participants sharing their families' experiences with corruption in the medical field.

Roxana: My uncle had a heart problem and he was here in [the city] to see a specialist, to have surgery, and the doctor said [that] if you pay a certain amount of money, you can have the surgery.

While the previous examples illustrate the participants' perceptions of corruption in the national government and in medical institutions, participants provided other examples including local government, licensing, and education. In essence, the participants' perception of widespread corruption is consistent with the findings by a World Bank report commissioned by the Romanian government in 2001 (Anderson, Cosmaciu, Dininio, Spector, & Zoido-Lobaton, 2001) and is a topic widely discussed in the Romanian, European, and world media. For the participants in this study, one

important part of this perception of corruption is the link to power and money, as alluded to by Vasile above, and as detailed in the next section.

Love of Money is the Root of All Evil . . . (1 Timothy 6:10)

The youth who participated in our study believe that power equals money in Romania. They believed that those with access to power—particularly politicians—are making the highest salaries. One distinct aspect of the discussion of corruption was the participants' beliefs that corrupt behaviors occurred because people, particularly those in positions of political power, were working for their own financial gain, which was frequently at odds with the financial security of the citizens and the nation. Mihai and Hope explained this concern through the example of the use of money from the European Union and the construction of new roads.

Mihai: The roads. Some people paid to some companies who are making the roads, at a big, big price. And, from that [money], they steal some money and the roads they are making are of very poor quality. So, it's very expensive and we get to pay for it and it's of very poor quality.

Hope (T): We get money from the European Fund and the money goes into their pockets.

The example above is similar to what we heard in other interviews. Institutional and individual corruption was not a topic introduced by the interviewer. It was always introduced by the participants; and, they provided examples of corruption in various levels and functions of government (e.g., licensing, police services, elections, judicial system, legislation), infrastructure improvements, educational institutions, and medical services. Whether these accusations of corruption are true was not the purpose of the study, although corruption is well-documented (Racoviță, 2011). Rather, the participants in the study perceived the existence of pervasive corruption in all levels of Romanian society. This belief about those in power in their country is one aspect of their civic identity as Romanian citizens. A potential consequence of this perception of corruption is that, given the participants' ages and lack of access to power and privilege, they do not see a place for themselves in the civic life of Romania, now, and potentially in the future, especially if nothing (e.g., the corruption) changes.

And Then Nothing Changes

The optimism that may accompany the growth of democratic institutions in formerly authoritarian nations was severely tempered by the participants' belief that, ultimately, there will be very few changes for Romania in the near future, and this lack of change would be negative. The final interview question in the last interview of the series asked participants to consider how Romania might be different in another 20 years, when their generation would be gaining access to political and economic power. Reflecting on the role of corruption today in inhibiting change now and in the future, Idina linked the existence of corruption to a sense of hopelessness. She stated:

I think we are thinking too Latin...It is just us [Romanians] that thinks that corruption is natural. A lot of countries gained force and power to overcome communism. We're just off. If we don't gather the power inside to change ourselves, we can't change our country.

Idina thought change was possible; however, she was pessimistic that some characteristics of her Latin heritage might inhibit positive change. At another school, Vasile echoed this pessimism, stating that 'A lot of Romanians . . . criticize everything . . . in the country, but don't try to make a difference,

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don't try to think of possible solutions, remedies'. Without making a specific cultural connection, Vasile's thoughts resonate with pessimism and hopelessness as he points out that while many complain and see problems, few attempt to effect change. Alina also articulated this pessimism about positive change in the future.

If the things are going as they are going now, I think things won't change. I don't know whose fault it is, but we are not very kind with other people. No one respects other persons. But if we change, it will be for nothing because we can't change the other people.

Alina's comment incorporates an inability to identify who or what to blame; but also expresses a hopelessness that even if youth think differently, they cannot change others. Loradonna tempers her pessimism with hope, but is specifically concerned about her age peers, offering:

I'm very sorry that I have to say this, but the answer, persons my age, are irresponsible. They don't take risks; they expect that [everything will] be done for them, and [they do not have] to do things. I hope that we will have a better Romania; [I] hold out hope.

While Alina and Loradonna specifically addressed their peers in the present, Kati talked about ongoing negative influences on her peers in the future. When asked what Romania would be like in another 20 years, Kati shared:

Kati: Hopefully, it will be better and there won't be so much corruption and everybody will have a decent life.

Interviewer: What do you think has to happen for those changes to happen?

Kati: People, especially politicians don't have to think only about themselves, they have to think about somebody else too.

While Kati, along with the other participants in the study believe that the end of the authoritarian regime was positive, the ongoing development of democratic traditions is, and will remain a struggle. As explored in the previously discussed category of misunderstanding freedom, the others who may be part of the problem cut across generations, but the problem squarely resides in Romania.

In sum, Transylvanian youth construct a passive civic identity, characterized by pessimism for the future. They acknowledge the importance of civic engagement in their emerging democracy, but, in general, they do not embrace an active and empowered identity that utilizes the freedoms and opportunities to improve life for themselves and others. Like youth in many nations, they believe they are politically and socially marginalized (see for example, Cousséé, Roets, & de Bie, 2009; Diemer & Li, 2011; Galston, 2001, Gordon, 2007). In addition, these youth are pessimistic about a better future – for themselves and for Romania.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the civic identities of youth in Romania, with a focus on Transylvanian youth. The civic identities constructed by the participants drew on, not surprisingly, their personal and recent experiences, collective experiences, and the collective historical memory held by individuals and institutions (Toshchenko, 2011). Relying on the voices of youth, results indicate that their civic identity is characterized by both optimism and pessimism. Optimistically, the participants believe that civic engagement is possible and desired; but few are engaged because,

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pessimistically, they believe that the freedom that comes with democracy is misunderstood and corruption permeates all aspects of their lives; and, ultimately, nothing changes. Further, their civic identity is characterized by abstract notions of a freedom that accompanies democracy, as well as concrete experiences with corruption.

Cautious Recommendations

As mostly American authors of this paper, we are cautious with our recommendations. For three of us, the Romanian experience with democracy is not our own and our understanding of Romania and of emerging democracies continues to evolve. Further, as educational scholars, all four of us (authors) are reminded of the trend of transnational educational reform borrowing and lending, as well as the concern over the oft-neglected element of agency when addressing this borrowing/lending (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000, 2002). In an increasing era of globalization, this borrowing and lending is not surprising and may hold benefits, and as Steiner-Khamsi notes, 'Borrowing is not copying. It draws our attention to processes of local adaptation, modification, and resistance to global forces in education' (2000, p. 5). We do believe that education, and civic education in particular, is an important component for moving youth from just an optimistic desire for civic engagement to both a desire and the actual engagement in the civic and political life of Romania, given that Romanian youth find few domestic examples of civic engagement in their communities (Uslaner, 2003).

The Potential of Civic Education

Civic education in Romania continues to evolve and has been marked by three distinct periods: 1996, 2003, and 2007. Both the Ministry of Education and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the major forces in the development and implementation of civic education curricula and programs 1996 marked the first institutional attention to the development of a civic education curriculum. Nationally selected teacher trainers worked with NGOs from western nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States, and supranational organizations such as UNICEF, to develop civic education curricula. These curriculum programs typically took conceptual frameworks supplied by the NGOs and worked with Romanian educators to adapt and modify these programs to the local context. Curriculum materials were rewritten and there were professional development programs for teachers coordinated and run by Romanian teacher trainers who had been originally been trained by non-Romanian staff. Many of these NGOS and programs are still in place, although the majority have evolved as British and American resources have slowed. Much of the current professional development programs are now Romanian-run and self-sustaining. A second wave of attention to civic education occurred in 2003 when the existing civic education curriculum was revised and approved by the National Ministry for grades 3 through 8 (primar and gimnazial) and civic education became a compulsory subject. Finally, since joining the European Union (EU) in 2007, there is additional attention and funding focusing on a civic education consistent with the values of the EU and European citizenship. This move to incorporate a European component to citizens' civic identity adds a level of complexity and the possibility of a transnational or European identity that may conflict with one's national and ethnic identity. Baban (2013) posits that European integration will positively promote an identity that is cosmopolitan and embraces the diversity of the peoples of Europe, nurturing a sense of commitment and belonging to another polis, is complex. The institutionalization of a democratically-framed civic education, whether national or European, is a positive step for preparing a new generation of Romanian citizens. However, shedding the communist past for a democratic future remains transitional in civic education policy, civic education

curriculum and implementation of the curriculum (Rus, 2008). Further, Romania, like many nations in the region, has focused on developing and promoting a civic education curriculum devoid of any 'ideological and political content' (Steiner-Khamisi, 2002, p. 194). This raises the question of how to educate politically informed young citizens without including historical, philosophical, and current political content. The same historical memory that affects the youth of Romania also affects the evolution of civic education.

This study is part of a larger and long term project examining civic and citizenship education in Romania. Knowing how students' are currently constructing their civic identities is one additional source of information for educators, curriculum developers, and teacher educators to consider as they design curriculum and instruction in future years. Mindful of the devastating communist past and the desire to express and embrace individualism, the pessimism associated with the selfish nature of corruption, as a component to participants' civic identity is troubling and should be explored further to determine if this is a national pattern. If so, it must be addressed in future iterations and at all levels of the civic education curriculum.

Conclusion

We return to Vasile's words that opened this paper. From his perspective, patience and support are necessary for Romania to become the democratic nation it envisions. Substantial progress has been made to shed the stifling yoke of the past, to heal deep wounds, and to participate in the difficult work of rebuilding a national infrastructure, all while learning a new political system and a 'mode of associated living' (Dewey, 1916, p. 101) that is democracy and as Romania continues to struggle with its communist past (Light & Phinnemore, 2001). As noted by Manea (2004), it is tremendously naïve to believe that any nation transitioning from a communist to democratic state will do so smoothly or quickly. It is unwise for anyone to compare an emerging democracy with any established democracy. What are now referred to established democracies, have gone through, and continue to weather ideological, financial, and constitutional crises. They have just been weathering these crises longer. Romania has and will experience diversions and setbacks as a people and the institutions they create drastically change. It is important to remember, however, that the youth of the nation are watching. Their patience is wearing thin as they bear witness to corruption and economic hardships. They are developing a civic identity in which democracy is characterized by the extremes of wealth and poverty, neither of which they believe is achieved through justice or the rule of law. It will be difficult for Romanian civic educators to nurture an identity that encompasses civic engagement for the betterment of individuals and the nation if they do not experience it in the small and large civic spaces they occupy. These youth will be in positions of power in another 20 years, and they are learning about democratic institutions and traditions from adults who are newly learning these institutions and developing these traditions themselves. How Romania's vision of democracy is constructed and lived in the future is related to the civic identity of its youth today.

Romania, like many nations in central and eastern Europe, is just 20 years into its democracy experiment. Just as Romania's youth are watching their elders at home and abroad, there are even newer emerging democracies, each with their own difficult histories and complex presents that may be watching Romania for guidance. How Romania's democracy evolves will offer lessons; the hope is that the lessons are positive.

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Acknowledgments

The first author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Fulbright organization whose award of a Fulbright Fellowship in the spring of 2009 supported the study conceptualization and data collection.

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. What does it mean to be a citizen of Romania?
2. What should democratic citizens know?
3. What should democratic citizens be able to do (as an aspect of democratic citizenship)?
4. What should democratic citizens value and care about (as an aspect of democratic citizenship)?
5. Who do you know that is a good democratic citizen and what makes him or her a good citizen?
6. What does it look like when someone is being a good citizen?
7. What does it look like when someone is not being a good citizen?
8. What do you do that is consistent with good citizenship?
9. In 20 years, you and your colleagues will be in charge in Romania. What do you think it will be like?